



Report 10 TIME TO SHINE LOCAL EVALUATION

TEST AND LEARN: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF FRONTLINE ORGANISATIONS

Produced for Leeds Older People's Forum

PREPARED BY:
Jean Townsend

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum



Time to
Shine



June 2022



Contents

	01 Introduction		
05	-About Time to Shine	25	04 How have delivery partners worked in partnership with other organisations?
06	- Scope of this report	26	- Types of partnerships
07	- Context	27	- Working with partners to set up a new service
07	- Evaluation methods	27	- Communication and changes in staff teams
08	- Summary of findings	28	- Challenges of partnership working in someone else's space
10	02 How have delivery partners tried to reach a diverse group of older people, particularly those who don't take part in existing projects?	29	- How could this learning be used to influence future practice?
10	- Promotional methods used	32	05 How have delivery partners worked in partnership with volunteers and with beneficiaries?
11	- Paper versus online advertising	32	- Expanding the pool of volunteers
11	- Information tables and stalls at local fairs/ community spaces	35	- The value of taking an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach
12	- Networking with colleagues and active members in the community	36	- Helping, neighbouring, volunteering - how do people see themselves?
12	- Encouraging word-of-mouth recommendations	36	- Defining the scope of services and volunteer roles
13	- Becoming a familiar person in the local scene	38	- Volunteers as the route to sustainability
13	- How could this learning be used to influence future practice?	38	- How could this learning be used to influence future practice?
16	03 How have delivery partners adapted and resourced projects to meet the needs of beneficiaries?	42	06 Conclusion
16	- Changes to the project scope	44	07 Related Reports
17	- Adapting projects to increase accessibility	46	08 Appendix 1- Test and Learn Case Study Template
19	- Adapting project delivery for older beneficiaries	47	09 Appendix 2 - Beneficiary Case Study Template
20	- Adapting project delivery for older people with additional or complex needs		
22	- How could this learning be used to influence future practice?		

Acknowledgements

The author of this report would like to thank:

Lisa Fearn, Hillary Wadsworth, Jessica Duffy, the Time to Shine Core Partnership, the Evaluation Sub-group and Leeds Older People's Forum. The Time to Shine delivery partners who have shared their learning through their test and learn case studies. Andrea Wigfield, Charlene Martin and Anna Leyland of the Centre for Loneliness Studies at Sheffield University. Louise Warwick-Booth of Leeds Beckett University. Rosie Connell of Leeds Trinity University. Sarah Alden who carried out research for the early part of the evaluation. Richard Dowsett of the National Lottery Community Fund. The peer researchers, stakeholders, beneficiaries and volunteers of Time to Shine who have given up their time to participate in the research.



A quick guide to the language used at Time to Shine

Ageing Better (AB)

The National Lottery Community Fund's national grant programme which funds Time to Shine until 2022. The full title of the programme is 'Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better'. 14 'Ageing Better' programmes were funded in England, including TTS in Leeds.

Beneficiary

An overarching term for individuals who engaged with a Time to Shine project on at least one occasion.

Delivery partner

An organisation commissioned to deliver activities or services as part of TTS. Delivery partners were commissioned by Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF).

Participant

A beneficiary aged 50+ who has engaged on three or more occasions with a TTS delivery partner project (for example joining in activities or receiving services).

Quarterly monitoring

A quarterly cycle used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from Delivery Partners to chart progress towards the Time to Shine targets and so that learning and case studies were captured regularly throughout the programme. Partner payments were only released when satisfactory monitoring returns were received.

Test and Learn questions

A set of questions created by members of the TTS team and Core Partnership to articulate what they would like to learn through the programme.

TTS outcomes

A list of 4 strategic outcomes that TTS worked towards. These are:

- 1 - Beneficiaries report that they are less isolated as a result of a programme intervention.
- 2 - Programme beneficiaries feel confident and able to participate in their communities
- 3 - Older people have been actively involved in managing, designing, delivering and evaluating the programme
- 4 - Our wider partnership will expand each year and will work better together to coordinate services and support for isolated older people.

Common Measurement Framework (CMF) evaluation questionnaire

The way in which the AB programme overall and TTS gathered information from older people involved in Delivery Partner projects.

Volunteer

A person who engaged on three or more occasions with a TTS project to give up their time to support any type of TTS activity. For monitoring purposes volunteers were categorised as either aged 50+ or younger.

The Time to Shine (TTS) programme, led by Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF), aimed to reduce isolation and loneliness for older people (50+) living in Leeds between 2015-2021¹. TTS was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund as part of the Fulfilling Lives: Ageing Better programme (AB)², which invested £80 million across 14 local authorities in England to reduce loneliness for older people and share good practice. The TTS programme worked in partnership with local organisations to commission, design, deliver and evaluate a range of activities, including campaigns and specific interventions³. As part of the TTS programme a suite of ten evaluation reports have been published by the evaluation team at the Centre for Loneliness Studies based in the University of Sheffield⁴. An overview of the ten reports is presented in **Report 1 TTS Evaluation Executive Summary**. This report is **Report 9** in this suite of reports.

The four main objectives of the Time to Shine programme were used to design the evaluation:

1. Each year beneficiaries report that they are less isolated as a result of a project intervention
2. Project beneficiaries feel confident and able to participate in their communities by 2021
3. Older people have been actively involved in managing, designing, delivering and evaluating the project
4. The wider partnership will expand each year and will work better together to coordinate services and support for isolated older people

There is very little evidence of what works when tackling loneliness and social isolation⁵. Consequently, one of the objectives of TTS was to generate new knowledge about what works so that evidence-informed approaches can be applied by TTS and others in the future.

¹ As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the TTS programme continued to operate beyond the original funded period; however, the evaluation reports were prepared at the end of the initial funded period in 2021.

² For more details see <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/blogs/ageing-better-big-lottery-fund-story-so-far>

³ Details of all TTS projects can be found at www.opforum.org.uk/projects-and-campaigns/time-to-shine/time-to-shine-projects

⁴ For more details see <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/socstudies/research/centres-and-networks/centre-loneliness-studies>

⁵ Courtin, E., & Knapp, M. (2017). Social isolation, loneliness and health in old age: a scoping review. *Health & social care in the community*, 25(3), 799-812.

This report seeks to contribute to the generation of new knowledge and focuses on the experiences of frontline organisations. It draws evidence from reports and Test and Learn case studies provided by delivery partner staff between October 2015 and March 2020 as part of the monitoring process for the programme. These reports demonstrate the ways in which delivery partners were challenged to adapt and grow, requiring new ways of thinking, approaches and resources.

This report highlights common themes and reflections and offers insight into life 'on the ground' and the type of challenges that TTS delivery partners identified, and addressed, through a Test and Learn approach. It presents the findings from the Test and Learn case studies of a very diverse group of delivery partners. As a result, this evaluation report is more focused on sharing their insight and identifying ways in which this learning could influence future practice, and less focused on evaluating the successes and challenges of applying a Test and Learn approach across the TTS programme. The latter is included in **Report 3 - Process evaluation**.

All the data for this report was collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is worth noting here that some of the learning in this report may be less relevant to a post-pandemic environment; face-to-face networking opportunities with external colleagues, for example. However, some learning may be even more relevant; such as gentle encouragement and ongoing support to help people rediscover their confidence to join in community activities following long periods shielding at home.

Specifically, this report looks at the benefits and challenges experienced by delivery partners and answers the following key questions:

1. How have delivery partners tried to reach a diverse group of older people, particularly those who don't take part in existing projects?
2. How have delivery partners resourced and adapted projects to meet the needs of beneficiaries?
3. How have delivery partners worked in partnership with other organisations?
4. How have delivery partners worked in partnership with volunteers?

1.2. Context

From the outset, potential applications for funding were encouraged by the National Lottery Community Fund to be innovative, ambitious and imaginative in their thinking about how to reduce loneliness and social isolation. Applicants were invited to use the opportunity of funding to try out new ideas and approaches, while also rigorously evaluating, learning and adapting practice and policy in response. Within TTS, commissioners and delivery partners embraced a culture of 'Test and Learn'; trying new things and questioning whether they worked or not, and why. The most important thing was to learn from this and use that learning to improve things in the future. This meant that there was less pressure on delivery partners for things to go right the first time. The knowledge gained was fed back into the programme through regular monitoring visits / reports, the delivery partners' network and through the work of the TTS learning facilitator.

1.3. Evaluation Methods

This report uses qualitative data gathered from delivery partners in the Test and Learn case studies submitted as part of routine monitoring. The documents were read and analysed to identify common themes and recurring issues to build an analytical thematic framework. Because of the significance of Test and Learn, all delivery partners were asked to report issues where they had applied this approach in their monitoring returns. An optional 'Test and Learn case study' template was also provided for this purpose (see [Appendix 1](#)). The standard format enabled staff to choose a case relevant to professional or service development; community engagement, partnerships and outcomes and to describe their actions, expectations, perceived successes and failures, and learning. A 'Beneficiary case study' template (see [Appendix 2](#)) and routine monitoring reports provided contextual understanding.

138 documents were reviewed and analysed for this report. These were a mixture of Test and Learn case studies, case studies and also monitoring returns from TTS Small Funds⁶ delivery partners. 27 TTS delivery partner projects, out of a total of 33 projects active between April 2015 and September 2020, provided at least one Test and Learn case study. The maximum number of Test and Learn case studies received from a single project was eight and the average was four. 27 TTS Small Funds projects, out of a total of 44 projects active between November 2015 and March 2020, provided a Test and Learn case study and/or completed a Test and Learn question on their monitoring return. The maximum number of Test and Learn case studies received from a single TTS Small Funds project was three and the average was one. Two LOPF internal projects, out of a total of three projects active between April 2015 and September 2020, provided 13 Test and Learn case studies.

⁶ TTS Small Funds projects were commissioned through Leeds Community Foundation, usually for 12 months. The maximum award was £10,000 per year and projects were on a much smaller scale than the TTS projects commissioned by LOPF.

There are limitations to the data, though many respondents appreciated the opportunity for reflection on issues which they found professionally or personally challenging. Where delivery partners reported regularly over two or three years, their reports offered insight into their development through different stages of the projects. Some issues are very specific and may not translate to a different or wider context. A comprehensive account of all the research methods used across the ten evaluation reports can be found in **Report 2: Methods**.

1.4. Summary of findings

Delivery partners in TTS were very diverse, with projects focusing on a broad continuum of support; working across the city or in local areas, with different geographical and cultural communities or with individuals with a range of specific needs and interests. Funding periods ranged from one year (Small Funds) to six years, although two to three years was the usual length for delivery partner projects. The common factor was that all projects were trying to find better ways of supporting older people who were experiencing loneliness and isolation. This meant that all projects travelled a journey through setting-up, developing and creating their support/service and identifying resources such as partners and volunteers. This had to be done within a limited time. The findings here are drawn from lessons learnt about their project journeys.

Reaching a diverse group of older people, particularly those who don't take part in existing projects, **takes more time than expected**, in terms of developing trusting relationships with older people, establishing links with potential referrers and offering a 'warm handover' to other groups. This is particularly important if the older person has complex needs. **Skilled community workers** employed by projects were able to engage older people who are very hard-to-reach. Demonstrating that venues, food and activities are **culturally appropriate** and promoting the project via **word-of-mouth from peers** works well, particularly when coupled with an invitation to travel together or meet before an activity starts.

Delivery partners **valued the Test and Learn approach** and opportunity for reflective practice and understood that it was endorsed by their funder. This involves accepting that **flexibility is essential for true co-production** and that the **scope of a project may change** in order to meet the needs or circumstances of target beneficiaries more effectively. A **person-centred approach**, supported by volunteers where necessary, was essential - for example by timing each activity to meet **personal access requirements**, providing **free WiFi**, or offering a range of **transport** options. Frontline staff need a **clear referral pathway** in order to access timely support for people with complex problems. Some older people who are socially-isolated may be more interested in communication and interaction and less interested in the skill they are learning so **incorporating social time** before, during and after activities helps people to build relationships.

Delivery partners placed a **high value on partnerships** in terms of resources, support, help and enhancement of services to reach older isolated people. Good partnerships offer **mutual benefits** to both organisations and to their beneficiaries and **regular communication** is vital. Developing links often works initially through access to keen individuals but the agreement needs to go deeper into partner organisations, **including senior management**, to enable stability and there needs to be a shared understanding that **circumstances can change** for all partners. There was a two-way lack of knowledge and familiarity between community-based organisations and some sectors, notably care homes and some NHS systems and sectors.

Volunteering can benefit the volunteer as much as the people they are volunteering to support. Asking people to help out in various ways, taking a **broad view of volunteering** and **giving support** to those who need extra help to become engaged extends the pool of people available and brings new capacity into the sector. It also requires imagination and energy. Being clear on **volunteer roles and expectations**, the skills needed, the remit and scope of the service from the outset helps to prevent future challenges. Involving **enthusiastic community activists** who have access to local influence, resources and contacts helps the **sustainability** of community-based projects.



02

How have delivery partners tried to reach a diverse group of older people, particularly those who don't take part in existing projects?

TTS adopted an experimental and wide-ranging approach to working with isolated and lonely older people. Consequently, most projects worked in different ways to reach beyond their usual clients and adopted new types of activities and social engagement. Some projects had little experience of working with older people and limited contact with existing networks of older people's groups.

Project workers anticipated that recruitment of older people would start slowly and build up gradually but many were surprised by just how slow and challenging the process was (see [Report 5: Motivations and Barriers](#)). The time-limited nature of commissioned projects added an extra pressure to achieve target numbers and many projects faced a steep learning curve. Despite challenges, many were successful in reaching the number and/or cohorts of beneficiaries they were aiming to support (see [Report 4: Intervention Typologies](#)).

2.1. Promotional methods used

When launching their project, delivery partners frequently tried both to make contact with isolated older people directly and also to reach them through other organisations and the wider public. A range of approaches were employed, usually in combination to meet this objective.

- A broad-brush approach to publicity using various media including emailing, posters, local radio, social media, parish magazines, fliers, leafleting door-to-door.
- Being visible in the community; attending community fairs, conferences, workshops, libraries, supermarkets, betting shops, pubs, local cafes.
- Contacting people in their networks by email, phone and personal visits.
- Contacting significant local organisations, e.g. GPs, Neighbourhood Network Schemes, key groups and people in specific geographical areas (Councillors, faith groups) or those from organisations and groups key to the projects' target beneficiaries.
- Contacting known older people and using word-of-mouth to reach others.

The **mini case study** relating to Toast Love Coffee (at the end of section two) is an example of the range of approaches and methods adopted by projects to promote themselves, with varying degrees of success. Project learning about the usefulness of these different methods pointed to positives and negatives in the approaches, as discussed in the following sections.

2.2. Paper versus online advertising

Projects which aimed to reach active older people in rural villages found that information on paper (for example leaflets, fliers, magazines from trusted organisations like Parish Councils or Neighbourhood Network Schemes⁷) rather than in digital format was popular with their beneficiaries. An urban community transport group, offering outings for older people, found that they soon exceeded their budget for leaflets and had to apply for money elsewhere to pay for additional printing. On the other hand, several organisations reported limited response from older people to door-to-door leafleting about new activities, although local publicity of this type, e.g. for a dementia befriending scheme, attracted some volunteers. Most schemes also used social media to reach out to older people; some found that their online publicity was picked up both by beneficiaries and by families and friends of older people, which led to referrals.

Projects used their local knowledge and a variety of ways to let people know about their services, switching to alternatives when one method didn't yield results. Positive advertising language was important. Using words such as 'community,' 'connections,' 'helping,' 'friendship,' 'involvement,' and 'welcome' in their publicity was more successful than advertising services for elderly, vulnerable, socially-isolated or lonely people.

2.3. Information tables and stalls at local fairs/community spaces

The evidence showed that attending fairs, workshops, stalls in libraries/supermarkets or information days was not effective for reaching isolated older people directly and several groups moved on to alternative methods of publicity. Using a Test and Learn approach after each of six community fairs, one project which aimed to promote TTS across the city refined its approach to attracting public attention, with successful methods including the use of free takeaway items (e.g. temporary tattoos, badges, sweets) and games at their stall for children and adults.

Some of these events could be useful for networking with other community staff groups. For example, regular attendance at local libraries by project workers was effective at building relationships with staff which led to them promoting the service to users of the venue. Overall, adopting these approaches required time and human resources which were proportionate to the audience, purpose and project.

⁷ Neighbourhood Networks are locally-based schemes, funded in part by Leeds City Council, that enable older people to take part in activities, volunteer and feel included in their local community.

2.4. Networking with colleagues and active members in the community

Networking with other community organisations working with older people was an essential part of most project promotion. Project workers found that single meetings with other community groups and staff to promote their new service often evoked enthusiasm from workers supporting older isolated people, but this did not necessarily result in referrals. Project workers realised that they needed to build up regular contacts, for example through attending community meetings where they could establish a relationship with the workers. This was challenging for small projects on a limited timescale.

A community development project aimed to identify potential hubs in a number of villages through a wide and systematic contact with community organisations and community connectors. This generated an extensive set of contacts with local activists who could either take the ideas for their area or point to likely new hubs. Organisations attempting to establish classes in care homes and day centres went through a similar identification process but experienced a lack of response from many of their target homes. However, in both cases, although potential partners were identified, there were further challenges in securing a partner to work with. These issues are further explored in the section on partnerships.

It was clear that networking required consistent work to build relationships and identify shared interests and mutual benefits.

2.5. Encouraging word-of-mouth recommendations

Using people known to the project workers within the community to reach older people by word-of-mouth was often a good way to get started, depending on the extent of older peoples' isolation. However, a referral or contact with an older person did not necessarily equate to engagement. Many projects initiated contact with a home visit but often found that one visit was not enough for the beneficiaries to agree to take part. For some there were two or three more visits before reaching this point. Volunteers were sometimes introduced at this time and skilfully built a friendly relationship which encouraged the older person to go out.

Word-of-mouth worked well when a friend or acquaintance who already attended or understood the activity encouraged others to take part. It worked best when they offered to travel to the activity together initially, or arrange to meet there at a specific date and time. Where this wasn't possible, project staff found that a 'warm handover' was often required. This involved staff or volunteers building rapport at home and/or over the phone and then accompanying the older person to the group or activity. This would happen a number of times to help them settle into the group, introduce them to others and help them become familiar with the setup. This frequently occurred where older people had high-level, complex needs. Even after a period of support at several groups, some individuals still dropped out, because of ongoing depression or their desire to have a permanent friend/buddy.

In some TTS projects working with South Asian communities, workers noted a reluctance to engage in activities outside the home. Staff overcame this through home visits to reassure the beneficiary, and their family, that their project was a safe and appropriate place and that their cultural needs would be met there.

2.6. Becoming a familiar person in the local scene

For the very hard-to-reach, more intensive work was required by skilled community workers. In a project aimed at engaging older isolated men, living alone, some with a history of substance dependence / prison, the worker spent time being regularly in the places they frequented. These included the betting shop, pub, clubs, local cafe; chatting with the staff and customers and becoming a familiar face. Only then did he begin to talk about the project and to ask the men if they would give a hand in the charity shop and warehouse. An arts group aiming to recruit isolated people for their performance project also found the need to simply be around older people's groups, taking an interest in and making friends with people, before they could begin to recruit people to their project.

2.7. How could this learning be used to influence future practice?

- When project planning and writing new grant applications, **build in more time at the start for outreach activities and relationship development.** Recruiting isolated older people to new activities is a slow process.
- Grant-givers or commissioners could consider **funding projects over a longer term.** The time-limited nature of grant-funded projects added an extra pressure to achieve target numbers and many projects faced a steep learning curve.
- Use **local knowledge** and a variety of ways to let people know about new services, reviewing and switching to alternative approaches when necessary.
- When project planning, **build in more time to attend regular external team meetings** for the duration of the project to establish and maintain a rapport with potential referrers. While challenging for small projects on a limited time-scale, consistent communication about shared interests and mutual benefits helps people turn their initial enthusiasm into practical action which yields results.
- **Use known contacts within the community** to reach older people by word-of-mouth; but recognise that a referral or single contact with an older person does not necessarily equate to engagement. Take time when needed to build up a relationship through multiple home visits, involving volunteers when possible, to encourage an older person to go out and join a group/activity.
- Ask existing members to 'bring a friend' because **word-of-mouth from peers** works well, particularly when coupled with an invitation to travel together or meet before an activity starts.
- Address individual needs by building **in time for staff to do a 'warm handover'** by accompanying older people to other groups, especially if the older person has complex needs.
- Demonstrate that venues, food and activities are **culturally appropriate.**
- **Employ skilled community workers** to engage older people who are very hard-to-reach.

Mini Case Study

Delivery partner - **Toast Love Coffee**

Project - **TLC Community Connect**

Context - **Toast Love Coffee (TLC) was a community cafe focusing on creating community and developing individual friendships using food and community activities as a connector in an ethnically and culturally diverse area of Leeds.**

The typology of the TLC Community Connect project was:

Target Group	Older people at risk of social isolation/loneliness
Type of intervention	Social Intervention
Aim of intervention	Reduce social isolation/Empowering older people to become more involved/Learning or improving skills
Level of impact	Individuals/Interpersonal/Community
Method of delivery	Face-to-Face
Type of delivery	Group
Location of provision	Provider's venue/Outdoor space

At the start of their new cafe and community hub venture, the project worker aimed to reach out to people who were isolated and who found it hard to leave their home. She did this by building Toast Love Coffee's community networks, attracting isolated older people to the cafe and seeing more people attend their free-of-charge groups. The project worker and local volunteers went in groups of two, three and four to talk with local shops and businesses, pharmacies, hair salons, betting shops, local libraries; places which may serve customers suffering from social isolation. They distributed publicity and had a wide email list of organisations who may be able to signpost people to the cafe. They offered talks to local staff teams in these organisations.

They expected that local organisations would really want to signpost older people to them e.g. local GP surgery's social prescribing workers. Initial responses to their efforts were disappointing, with difficulties in contacting people, low take up of offers to speak to staff teams and fewer people signposting than expected. Local shops were friendly and positive but they recognised that they needed to follow these up to strengthen relationships.

At the cafe, they initiated a programme of learning and development for volunteers to feel more empowered to signpost customers to groups where appropriate and put on one-off events to attract new customers and attendees, which have been very successful. All groups and events were extensively promoted on social media.

Internally, their one-off events worked brilliantly to extend their reach, though they took time and it required a bigger team of organisers to deliver them without impacting on the cafe team and planners in a stressful way. Anything with a creative, celebratory theme worked very well and fulfilled a real gap in this diverse, inner-city, varied community. People started to drop into the cafe for coffee, but not always to join in groups and activities where they could socialise and make friends with others. Future plans for the next six months included more focus on volunteers; offering awareness sessions about isolation and loneliness; encouragement to develop friendships with their customers in the cafe and encourage them to join in the activities and groups; and opportunities to attend community network meetings.

Thinking about what had been learned, the project worker identified:

- the importance of valuing what you have achieved so far;
- the need for more human resources (staff and experienced volunteers) and practical resources to invest time for real community networking;
- joint local forums to share knowledge and issues;
- transport or buddies to help people to leave their home;
- focusing on barriers which stop isolated people from joining in;
- training/educating staff and volunteers to encourage individuals to take part.



03

How have delivery partners adapted and resourced projects to meet the needs of beneficiaries?

TTS projects were co-commissioned around the needs of particular client groups, geographical areas or activities. Funding was agreed on the basis of specific project plans. There was, however, scope for projects to test things out and develop new ideas as long as the focus remained on reducing isolation and loneliness. TTS projects were most successful when they were flexible and responsive to individuals' needs. The thematic analysis of Test and Learn case studies and reports identified the importance of having adequate time to build up relationships with older people in the project, to earn their trust, understand their needs and abilities and to respond in a personalised way to their requirements.

Several project changes occurred as part of the iterative process of the Test and Learn approach. These included changing the scope of the project, adapting the timings and the approaches taken by projects to work with older people and those with additional needs.

3.1. Changes to the project scope

Some delivery partners had to change the scope of their project to meet the needs or circumstances of their target beneficiaries. This was positively encouraged at TTS due to the programme's commitment to a Test and Learn approach. Delivery partners valued this flexibility endorsed by the funder.

A project for Asian elders, Raat di Roti, is highlighted as a **mini case study** at the end of section three. This project demonstrated a significant impact on uptake of the service when it was adapted to meet the practical and cultural issues for beneficiaries and volunteers.

Other examples shared in the Test and Learn case studies included a walking group for local people with dementia. This was initially designed to run like existing community walking groups, with different walks each week, but with increased volunteer support. The project workers realised after their initial dementia training that they should focus simply on walking in the local park. Weekly walks in a familiar space offered people a routine which helped them to relax, feel secure and build up friendships, while appreciating fresh air, changes in the park over the seasons and the coffee and cakes in the local cafe.

Staff in a gardening group argued that there was a real need for flexibility about activities on offer in a project committed to co-production. They found several isolated men who wanted to join their project for social contact but had no interest in gardening. With the agreement of TTS they extended their range of activities. All these projects were positive about being able to respond flexibly as they learnt through experience.

3.2. Adapting projects to increase accessibility

Though many projects used TTS funding to arrange for people to travel to activities, transport, as expected, was still raised as a barrier to attending groups in a number of Test and Learn reports (see [Report 5: Motivations and Barriers](#) for more details).

Two Neighbourhood Network Schemes were funded to review their existing transport arrangements and develop solutions. One undertook a strategic review of their transport usage, looking at how it was offered to people and whether there were alternatives. While they concluded that more funding was still required for transport to enable and encourage some of their members to leave the house, they found that they improved use of their current resources. Some people currently transported to groups were happy to walk to activity venues when they were accompanied by a volunteer buddy. By contracting with a local cab company to provide transport to groups, they were able both to educate the drivers about the needs of older people living with frailty and to give beneficiaries a chance to get to know the drivers. Several older people then used that firm to go out and about independently.

The second project focused on enhancing its minibus service. They did this by recruiting more volunteer bus buddies and drivers and promoting their minibus to other community groups, so that their resources were more cost-effective. Better support of and consultation with the bus volunteers led to real improvement in the transport experience for older people and was integrated into the organisation's routine procedures.

Other beneficiaries were able to make use of public transport to attend TTS projects. Where this was the case, delivery partners quickly learned to offer activities that avoided travel during rush hour and adapted the timing so that older people could use their concessionary bus passes after 9.30am.

Flexibility was especially relevant with projects for older people with health needs, and their carers. Several projects found that attendance at groups was erratic, due to ill-health and hospital appointments etc. which led them to adapt the planned programmes.

In one planned carers' course, the proposed three hour monthly session was adapted to a two-hour weekly session over six weeks in response to beneficiary feedback. This proved much more practical for its beneficiaries as they all had caring responsibilities. A dance therapy group for people with Parkinson's Disease and a digital cafe for people with Aphasia (an impaired ability to understand or produce speech) similarly had issues about attendance because of ill-health and medical appointments. Both projects offered personalised programmes of work, supported by volunteers, at home between the classes to maintain continuity.

A monthly walking group for visually-impaired Asian men found that they were not meeting often enough for people to develop relationships. As the winter approached, they changed from monthly walks to weekly exercise sessions in a local gym, which was really successful in enabling people to make friends and improve fitness.

The cost of attending classes and obtaining transport was less of a barrier to access during the funded period of a project (i.e. because there was little or no cost to the individual for travel or participation) though it was an issue of concern for project workers looking towards sustainability.

One project which aimed at developing social opportunities in sheltered accommodation found that their beneficiaries did not commit to regular payments for classes but chose to attend if they felt like it. This made the classes with tutors unviable in the longer term and several closed. The project worker and house manager decided instead to explain the need for regular payments to pay the tutors and to ask beneficiaries to pay their contribution for the activity on a termly basis. This proved more successful and enabled classes to continue after the project funding ceased.

In other projects there were issues with individuals paying for their attendance at sessions. For example, an art project for people with learning disabilities found that some participants did not have a medical diagnosis and so were not in receipt of their full government-issued benefits. As a consequence, they were not able to afford support or transport costs when the TTS funding ceased. If projects are to be sustained after grant funding ends then it is important for staff to have sensitive but honest conversations about money and to refer people for support if necessary.



3.3. Adapting project delivery for older beneficiaries

Delivery partners were often highly skilled in a particular activity or skill-set, for example in the Arts or IT sectors, but less experienced with working with older people and especially with those who are isolated and lonely. Their Test and Learn reports drew on workers' practices of reflective learning as they adapted their approaches to this group of beneficiaries. A community development organisation, which had limited prior experience with older people, was funded to provide a digital postcard project to help improve IT skills. They benefited from the practical experience and advice of the local Neighbourhood Network Scheme manager on matters like the venue, transport, and timings of sessions. However, after a tricky introductory session, the tutors reflected on appropriate ways of engaging with older people:

We underestimated the power of building relationships first. Isolated elderly people are interested in communication and interaction as priorities over new information.

Project Worker

They adapted their delivery style and content, adopting a structured approach to digital learning combined with social time and personal chats. This created a project which was greatly enjoyed by the participants and brought shared awareness of intergenerational learning. Another digital scheme shared these experiences. They explored the processes of trial and development in finding the most appropriate technical equipment for individual beneficiaries, as well as the challenges of working in community rooms and sheltered accommodation without WiFi. They concluded that while these hurdles were surmounted in the short-term, practical issues of access to suitable technology / hardware for older people and reliable WiFi connectivity needs to be addressed if digital exclusion is not to be perpetuated.

3.4. Adapting project delivery for older people with additional or complex needs

Many workers had to learn, through reflection and adaptation, the best approach to engage older people with dementia or high levels of physical disability.

A project in a care home was designed to help residents to correspond with school children. It became apparent that the residents needed support not only to talk through what they might write but also support to physically write the letters. The worker had not anticipated this loss of confidence and skills. As a result of this learning she wrote the letters they composed together and read them to the older people who signed them off. She aimed to build up their confidence as the sessions progressed. She also looked to run the group at a different time when the residents may be more alert.

Flexibility and reflective practice were essential attributes for the people working in innovative projects. For example, a facilitator of an Arts-based project offering movement and dance reflected on the challenges of co-production with their clients:

Key to shaping any participation was a flexible, ego-less approach to work with what was arising at each moment. As interactions with participants, particularly [those] with dementia, had so many moveable possibilities, the ability to move away from and feel comfortable to work away from a plan or script, highlights for me a required skill of the facilitator.

Project Worker

Some projects focused on older people referred by health and social care agencies for time-limited support to promote social reconnection and wellbeing. While these aims were achieved for many, some referrals involved such complex, high-level needs that the beneficiary needed extensive levels of support over an extended period of time. Delivery partners identified the following characteristics of the beneficiaries who presented with a need for this high level of input:

- combination of physical and mental health conditions, often in 'younger older' people (50-70 years);
- people with serious housing problems who were isolated, often combined with mental health problems;
- frail older people who had dementia and were living alone or without close family support.

At times, delivery partners felt that the referrer was aware that the referral was inappropriate, but they had nowhere else to turn. This challenged projects with a single paid staff member as such complex issues could not be taken on by volunteers.

One TTS project aimed to provide social support and activities for older isolated people, alongside but independently of the same organisation's existing Community Support Team. On an assessment visit to a man referred from his GP surgery for social support, the worker found the man distressed and depressed, in poor living conditions from which he was about to be evicted. She contacted the Community Support Team within her organisation, who referred him for emergency mental health crisis housing. The organisation recognised the likelihood of similar situations happening again and created protocols of referral between their two projects, enabling two-way referrals. By working through these problems, using a Test and Learn approach and making adjustments, the voluntary organisations strengthened their ability to respond promptly to challenging situations.

The need for intensive one-to-one work was also identified to support beneficiaries who experienced a sudden decline in health leading them to withdraw from the group. The challenge these cases presented to project workers who had limited experience in dealing with higher level needs, were highlighted in a number of Test and Learn case studies.

The TTS delivery partners varied greatly in size and structure but most had procedures for the work and clientele they normally engaged with. New projects brought up new issues, sometimes unanticipated. Test and Learn case studies revealed that project workers were developing new policies and procedures internally and across agencies to meet challenges relating to client needs and behaviours. This broadened and strengthened the service provision within the community sector.



3.5. How could this learning be used to influence future practice?

- Funders could embrace a **Test and Learn approach** as delivery partners valued this and understood that it was endorsed by their funder. This involves accepting that **flexibility is essential for true co-production**. Changing the scope of a project meets the needs or circumstances of target beneficiaries more effectively, particularly when this change arises following training, feedback or practical experience.
- Incorporate **adequate time to build relationships** with older people, earn their trust, understand their needs and abilities and to respond in a personalised way.
- **Timing** of each activity is important and needs to be agreed following discussions with members.
- **Personalised programmes of work**, supported by volunteers where necessary, maintain continuity for people who can't attend sessions regularly.
- **Reflective practice** could be encouraged as staff adapt their approaches to suit different groups of beneficiaries.
- Older people who are socially-isolated may be more interested in communication and interaction and less interested in the skill they are learning. **Incorporating social time** before, during and after activities helps people to build relationships.
- The provision of **free WiFi** in community rooms and sheltered accommodation is necessary, if digital exclusion is not to be perpetuated.
- Frontline staff need a **clear referral pathway** in order to access timely support for people with complex problems. Older people can't be expected to develop or maintain social contacts if urgent practical, physical and mental health needs aren't addressed first.
- **Transport** is a perennial problem but it is useful to spend time analysing how an organisation uses the transport options available to them and to improve the use of current resources.
- Making contact with a reliable **local taxi firm** had mutual benefits - drivers better understood the needs of older people living with frailty and older people got the chance to get to know the drivers, leading to more journeys.
- Money is an emotive topic for many people and extreme poverty exists. Proactive, honest and sensitive **conversations about money matters** can help people to address financial challenges.

Mini Case Study 2

Delivery partner - **Touchstone Sikh Elders**

Project - **Raat Di Roti**

Context - **The project connected Punjabi-speaking families with Punjabi-speaking isolated older people to foster cross-generational relationships. Once a fortnight, volunteers shared the evening meal, or raat di roti, together.**

The typology of the Raat Di Roti project was:

Target Group	Demographic focus
Type of intervention	Social Intervention
Aim of intervention	Reduce social isolation/Empowering older people to become more involved/Improving mental health
Level of impact	Individuals/Interpersonal
Method of delivery	Face-to-Face
Type of delivery	One-to-one/Group support
Location of provision	Provider's venue/Participant's home

The Raat Di Roti (evening meal) project was set up to reach socially isolated and lonely Punjabi-speaking elders based in Leeds by matching them with Punjabi-speaking volunteers. In its original plan it was expected that the volunteer would host a meal in his/her own family home and invite an elder to join them. By doing this the volunteer would be engaging an elder to experience a family setting where cross generations eat together and share stories.

When initially recruiting volunteers for Raat Di Roti the majority of people stated it was a fantastic idea but they did not feel they could contribute their time to deliver the project, particularly where there was a requirement to pick up and drop off an elder. They said that 'after a day's work, they wanted to find relaxation time or provide time to their own family'. The comments continued to indicate that 'bringing an elder to their house was an imposition'. One volunteer was happy to participate in Raat Di Roti in his own home but had to withdraw when he did not have the support of his family.

Also, they found that during the winter and cold months all elders turned down the opportunities of dinners in the volunteer's homes, purely because they did not wish to venture out into the cold and dark. Significantly, some felt that to go to a stranger's house for a meal may bring criticism and shame on their family.

Volunteers provided constructive feedback and suggestions. Most thought it would be less time consuming and more suitable for volunteers to deliver Raat Di Roti to an isolated elder's home. There was also a push to create flexibility to allow the project to work during the day as well as in the evening. By being more flexible in when and where meals were offered and by addressing cultural sensitivities, uptake increased significantly.



04

How have delivery partners worked in partnership with other organisations?

All TTS projects endeavoured to work in partnership with other organisations to a greater or lesser extent, investing time, energy and resources in order to make and maintain those connections and collaborations. Partnerships often offered positive benefits for older people and for the delivery organisations themselves. Partnership working had its challenges, but overall it enabled:

- more holistic services and **mutual benefits**;
- **new opportunities** and approaches, widening the range of activities open to older people and energising partners;
- new social hubs created through community networks, and more **social engagement** stimulated in care homes and similar environments;
- the **potential to share** training, knowledge and expertise across the system, supporting the development of person-centred services;
- **better use of existing resources**;
- opportunities to work with wider networks which offered **potential for future development**.



4.1. Types of partnerships

There were various ways that partnerships between delivery partners and other organisations occurred in practice, with some examples of these community partnerships given in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Types of partnerships between TTS delivery partners and other community service providers.

Type of partnership	Example
Reciprocal support	A local community centre set up a Supper Club for older people with support from the local Neighbourhood Network Scheme. The Neighbourhood Network helped with transport, and also by sorting out problems (e.g. benefits, utilities, housing) that came to light as the older people chatted with volunteers over a relaxed supper. The Neighbourhood Network Scheme benefited from new social provision in the area to which they could refer lonely local people.
Sharing expertise	Some projects which worked with older people with specific medical needs found huge benefit in close relationships with medical staff who supported training programmes for volunteers. Community-based older people's groups valued specialist expertise as they developed targeted projects for specific groups. A dementia walking group was improved by training at the outset and at midpoint from Dementia Awareness experts. Its value was maximised by sharing training with other community schemes in their network.
Sharing resources	<p>Links between the TTS delivery partners meant that several used the canal boat purchased by one project. This helped the new project to grow and promote itself across the city and provided an interesting and unusual activity to offer to beneficiaries.</p> <p>Several projects found that communal spaces in sheltered housing were often unused in part because nothing was happening in them. Offering activities and courses breathed some life into them and gave residents an opportunity to socialise.</p>

4.2. Working with partners to set up a new service

Where partners were coming together to create a new service, reports illustrated some challenges experienced in a range of different contexts.

Communication between partners about the extent and levels of responsibility for particular aspects of the work was essential. Sometimes a written understanding was created but this area needed to be fully fleshed out at all levels of the organisations involved. There were several examples of agreements and partnerships negotiated at management level which met problems at grass roots level. Unforeseen pressures and circumstances in one partner organisation could disrupt the planned work and impact on all partners. Examples included the loss of a key member of staff or inability to recruit suitable volunteers.

A lack of shared understanding about the nature of the project or shared commitment to its aims could lead to lack of progress with the work. For example, a partnership aiming to set up a preventative social friendship service for active older people with dementia foundered because the delivery partner's current priorities and limited resources were focused on befriending housebound older people with dementia. Test and Learn reports from all the partners in this project revealed that, with greater understanding of the unmet needs to be addressed, they did not have adequate resources across the partners to carry out the desired level of work and that they actually needed more funding before embarking on the project.



Linking with other projects is most useful when everyone has clear, shared expectations

Delivery Partner

4.3. Communication and changes in staff teams

For voluntary groups working with people referred from statutory agencies, developing referral protocols could be an essential but tricky learning curve. There were issues relating to changing project personnel and effective communication with partner organisations. For example, one social reconnection service, which had joint plans to receive referrals from a statutory rehabilitation service, had discussed these practicalities before the TTS funding was awarded. However, they found that a change of key staff at the beginning of the project meant that they needed to explain to the statutory team again, from scratch, what they could offer. This was followed up with protracted discussions about methods, GDPR, and the technicalities of sending referral data between organisations, before drafting and agreeing a formal procedure. Eighteen months later, the flow of referrals was just beginning to work well with work ongoing to refine ways of day-to-day working.

Similarly, a change of staff where new staff in post were either unaware of the partnership arrangements or had other priorities created problems and delays. Reports show the need for multiple people, including managers and frontline staff, to be aware of partnership discussions.

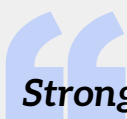
4.4. Challenges of partnership working in someone else's space

Many projects were not carried out in the delivery organisation's own space but required partnership with others to secure a venue and to access clients. Within the community, some small projects sought support from established groups like the Neighbourhood Network Schemes or community health promotion groups. Several delivery partners were very despondent about the lack of response but, with greater contact, recognised that all the organisations had their own work rhythms and pressurised times. One project worker said, on reflection, that her requests were unrealistic around the Christmas period and in the Summer because of the Neighbourhood Network Schemes' planned activities. Additionally, many community organisations use newsletters as a prime method of communicating with members so needed to fit requests for publicity into that schedule. In other cases, lack of response was surmised to relate to internal work pressures, or to gate-keeping. Whatever the cause, this remained a pressure on project workers who were funded to engage older people and achieve targets in a time-limited project.

In one project, beneficiaries talked about enjoying films but not being able to go to the cinema and at the same time, the project worker had experienced difficulty forming a partnership with the local Neighbourhood Network Schemes. The project worker changed her approach, and approached the Neighbourhood Networks with the offer of free mobile cinema events. This facilitated a partnership with the Neighbourhood Networks where the TTS project began to use their venues for free; the projects shared the cost of publicity; and TTS beneficiaries were introduced to their local Neighbourhood Network Scheme members and their programme of activities.

For projects which were working across several communities or within a number of care homes, there was a complex series of negotiations and processes to go through to achieve effective partnership working. This is expanded on in the [mini case study](#) from Yorkshire Dance at the end of section four which offers a longitudinal view of partnership development, showing a multi-layered approach.

Reports, particularly from projects working in care homes, showed the complexity of working in someone else's space. Care homes have their own routines, regulations and priorities, where staff time is at a premium and regular work with external partners is not well established. Some activity organisers within the homes could be defensive in their attitudes, rather than facilitative. However, some successful partnerships were developed, as evidenced by a quote from a delivery partner:



Strong relationships were developed with care staff who knew people well. Key for artists to understand progress (being made by older people with dementia). Good partnership in practice.

Delivery Partner

These challenges were also experienced by some projects working in other community-based settings, such as sheltered accommodation, where there were internal power struggles around control and usage of communal spaces. They are evidenced in reports from Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) projects, where the lack of support of all decision-makers in a potential partner organisation or workload pressure could prevent the establishment of work in shared premises. Partnerships were more successful if the mutual benefits of working together were identified at the right time for both organisations.

4.5. How could this learning be used to influence future practice?

- Delivery partners place a high value on partnerships in terms of resources, support, help and enhancement of services to reach older isolated people. Good partnerships offer **mutual benefits** to both organisations and to their beneficiaries.
- **Regular communication** is vital. Initial and ongoing contact between partners ensures a full understanding of each other's perspectives and of the aims of the project in which they are involved.
- Understand that **circumstances can change** for partners and this might reduce their ability to continue with the work. It's also important to be aware of each partner's pressures, **patterns of working**, and ways of communication.
- Be alert to **pre-existing difficulties** within organisations, community groups, and sheltered housing over access to space and resources.
- Recognise that there are individual differences among staff in the ways they engage in partnerships. It takes time to get to know people and to **create relationships which engender trust**.
- Developing links often works initially through access to keen individuals but the agreement needs to go deeper into partner organisations, including **senior management**, to enable stability.
- All of this takes **time**.

Mini Case Study

Delivery partner - **Yorkshire Dance**

Project - **In Mature Company**

Context - **One-to-one, small group and large group dance and movement sessions in care homes, led by professional dance artists and musicians, focusing on people living with dementia.**

The typology of the In Mature Company project was:

Target Group	Living situation/Health Focus
Type of intervention	Creative/Health
Aim of intervention	Reduce social isolation/Improve mental health/ Improve physical health
Level of impact	Individuals/Interpersonal
Method of delivery	Face-to-Face
Type of delivery	One-to-one/Group support
Location of provision	Participant's Home (care home)

The sequence of reports over three years from Yorkshire Dance, who successfully ran creative sessions in several care homes, show that partnership working in this context is an ongoing process. It works at multiple levels, all of which have to be addressed to enable social engagement for older isolated people.

After a successful first year in which three dementia care homes were selected through an open call out to host creative movement sessions, they aimed to reach out to a new group of homes in different geographical areas to include those who did not have an Activity Coordinator in post. Supported by Leeds City Council's Care Quality Team to promote the project, they sought volunteer care homes. There was a greater response than in Year one with 19 applicants.

They shortlisted and visited five care homes from the replies but could not select three of these as hosts for the dance sessions for a variety of reasons. These included no staff available each week to support activities; concerns about completing data capture forms; reluctance, due to a lack of understanding, to the use of Dementia Care Mapping⁸ as the main evaluation methodology; and in one national care home chain

⁸ Dementia Care Mapping™ involves continuously observing the behaviour of people with dementia and the care they receive during specific timeframes.

the local Care Home Manager was not able to give permission. Yorkshire Dance accepted two shortlisted homes who were willing to be partners, and went back to one of the longlisted applicants who had worked on an arts project before. All these homes had a track record of being proactive in bringing in external activities or volunteer programmes. This stage involved negotiations with the care home manager and sometimes the regional manager.

The next stage involved negotiating the terms of access and drawing up a written contract of understanding. Based on learning from year one, Yorkshire Dance knew that the partnership worked best with a contact person within the home (as opposed to a regional Activity Coordinator), often an Activity Coordinator. For year two, Yorkshire Dance and the home agreed on a nominated contact person in each home to maintain communication. Due to fragility in the face of staff pressures and absence, this was amended to a small contact team to ensure more continuity and a greater pool of supporters. This was an important partnership to help to dovetail the project into the care homes.

Even after all this preparation, work at the grass-roots required great flexibility from the project worker and artists. The care homes had their own rhythms, systems and routines for the care of residents. Staff were busy with everyday work and on one occasion did not prepare an alternative room for the session while the normal room was being decorated. Care staff were often called out of sessions for more pressing care needs and different levels of confidence meant not all staff felt comfortable actively engaging in the dance session alongside the residents. However they knew the older people in their care well, which was helpful in guiding the artists in understanding the residents and their history. Where communication and depth of engagement developed between the artists, care staff and older people, this enriched the work and led to enthusiasm and engagement from the staff outside the sessions, which had the potential to influence day-to-day interactions with residents.



05

How have delivery partners worked in partnership with volunteers and with beneficiaries?

With limited funding and many people to reach, volunteers were a vital part of the human resources to enable all the projects to meet their aims. The significance of volunteering on TTS projects and its impact on older adults is explored in **Report 7: The impact of TTS on project beneficiaries**. Here we focus on the messages from Test and Learn case studies about some of the ways in which the partnership between projects and volunteering impacted on the nature and scope of the service/support provided.

5.1. Expanding the pool of volunteers

The benefits for volunteers themselves in helping others were well-documented and evidenced in TTS reports and case studies. There was reciprocity for the projects in recruiting more volunteers, while offering positive benefits to the volunteers. Several projects also sought to expand the pool of volunteers available and some of the motivations for volunteering are presented in **Table 2**.



Table 2: Motivations for volunteering

	Example
<p>Engaging with people experiencing life changes</p>	<p>Some recent retirees joined projects as volunteers to find a new interest and meet up with people as they developed their new lives. For them, volunteering was a preventative measure against loneliness and lack of purpose while their valuable skills were quickly recognised and put to use, but also provided valuable resources to projects. For example, in two projects, recently retired drivers were quickly snapped up to drive minibuses. The mini case study at the end of section five provides an example of a newly retired volunteer enabling a service to grow.</p>
<p>Engaging people from new communities as volunteers</p>	<p>Some people who had experienced significant changes in their lives wished to volunteer to repay support they had received and to use their skills to help others. A Small Funds project run by Syrian refugees to support older people in the area with shopping and friendship was inspired by their desire to contribute to their new society and to integrate themselves into it. The identified support needed for the volunteers, as they developed relationships with older people, was information about where to refer those who confided in them about other problems. This was addressed if they were able to partner with another group which had this expertise.</p>
<p>Recruiting beneficiaries as volunteers</p>	<p>Several delivery partners benefited as their beneficiaries became confident enough to become volunteers. One project, offering opportunities to socialise over a shared meal, initially recruited their table hosts from their existing pool of volunteers and anticipated that this would be their normal source of future volunteers. However, when they sought to expand the project, they were delighted to find that several of their current beneficiaries stepped up as volunteers. Five of these people had joined the group in a time of personal crisis, e.g. bereavement. They had gained such a boost in confidence and wellbeing that they wanted to offer this opportunity to others. The project benefited from new volunteers with first-hand experience of the project.</p> <p>One report from a group offering social support to people with long-term mental health problems indicated that this is not always an appropriate route for every beneficiary, although the project remained committed to recruiting people with mental health problems as volunteers. They noted the need for clarity about volunteer roles and skills needed.</p>

Table 2: Motivations for volunteering Cont'd

	Example
<p>Supporting volunteers who were lonely and diffident</p>	<p>A project close to the university had noted the loneliness and diffidence of some of their student volunteers. They created an intergenerational project, aimed at giving additional training and support to these students to enable them to befriend some of their lonely clients. This proved to have reciprocal benefits, with many of the students growing in confidence as they provided support to others and continuing to volunteer, either with the project or in other groups.</p>



Listening to other people's stories, their being open about their lives with me had a huge impact on me. I thought less about my own worries and actually started to do something about them. I'll definitely do more volunteering after this.

Student Volunteer



5.2. The value of taking an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach

Some TTS projects aimed to recruit lonely or isolated people as project volunteers. There could be difficulties in achieving this and delivery partners reported that adopting a flexible, person-centred approach was necessary. Personal benefits for the individuals could be highlighted to potential volunteers. For example in two sheltered accommodation facilities, new residents were encouraged to use volunteering as a vehicle for integration and connection with their new neighbours.

This approach was used in several projects which aimed to engage older men, e.g. offering a community gardening service, and undertake conservation activities. One project in South Leeds engaged with isolated older men, some of whom lived at the margins of society in a deprived inner-city area, and asked for their help in a charity shop and warehouse. A project worker summed up the elements which worked well in their approach as:

- **a relationship of adults with adults** – not 'othering' isolated older people;
- letting potential volunteers **choose how and when** they give input;
- **asking older people if they can help you**, not offering to help them;
- **building trust**;
- maintaining a sense of **personal pride** / thanking but not necessarily giving gifts and awards.

Taking a broad view of volunteering and giving support to those who need extra help to become engaged in this way extends the pool of people available and brings new capacity into the sector. It also requires imagination and energy. The examples in the previous two sections point to the value of not seeing 'volunteers' and 'beneficiaries' as fixed categories but accepting that everyone may both need support for themselves and give it to others. Projects found that a broader conception of the possibilities of volunteering could widen the pool of resources available and offer a way to move towards more inclusive communities.

5.3. Helping, neighbouring, volunteering - how do people see themselves?

'Volunteering' can convey ideas of service and responsibility in a formal sense which do not always chime with people's perceptions of themselves. They may define the support they offer in their areas as helping, neighbouring and /or volunteering. Some groups wrestled with this issue, since safeguarding responsibilities and governance issues often require a structure of policy and procedures for volunteering with vulnerable older people.

A project worker who supported ABCD projects in five different rural communities reflected on the variations across the hubs of the ways in which people choose to 'volunteer.' There was a high level of commitment of time and resources by all the voluntary supporters. While almost all were local older people offering their committed support within their own village, only 50% were formally registered as volunteers; not all would wear badges; only half participated in events for a Leeds-wide Volunteer Week which celebrated volunteers. She concluded that many saw their volunteering as '**what we do - just our contribution to village life**' rather than as 'volunteering'.

Similarly, in a deprived inner-city ward in Leeds, resistance to the notion of formal volunteering was in evidence. One community connector project, run by a Neighbourhood Network Scheme, started by recruiting people who were already providing support to their older neighbours. The aim was to create a group for mutual support and to link them into the project as their local referral point for support. They planned to expand by bringing in new people who would 'look out for' people on their own streets. Despite initial success, it became apparent that many of the 'street agents' supported their neighbours through friendship and their sense of neighbourliness but did not see this as a formal volunteering relationship. Labelling what they did naturally was an uncomfortable responsibility and development of the project stuttered to a halt. Expansion for this project occurred through a new approach, using a more conventional community development approach, linking to leaders of established groups within the area and working more closely with them, while maintaining close personal contacts with the identified good neighbours.

The differing conceptualisation of the volunteer role did not affect the quality of volunteers' 'service' delivery but it did impact on service development and scope.

5.4. Defining the scope of services and volunteer roles

The contribution of volunteers was often a vital resource for project delivery, with services often defined by what volunteers were trained and willing to do. Clarity about the remit and scope of the service, matched with the potential skills, interests and training required by volunteers were key to establishing projects. Examples of how volunteers influenced the scope of the project are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Examples of how the scope of volunteers influenced project delivery or operation

Scope of volunteers	Example
Expertise and interest of the volunteers	A project to set up a community museum relating to fire service history in a new community hub attracted a number of enthusiastic volunteers. All had personal interests in the Fire Service and enjoyed the social chat and reminiscence about the memorabilia for the museum. The group provided valuable information in the group sessions and proved adept at offering tours to locals and running community events. The worker, however, had anticipated that the technical curation of the objects, research and writing up information would also be part of the volunteers' work but this was of less interest to them. This aspect fell to the worker, with some help from students. He concluded that he needed to recruit additional volunteers with specific skills to support future development.
Clearly defining the role of the volunteer and the nature of the project	One project illustrated the challenges of defining the boundaries of a new service; a short-term befriending service which reached out to clients with potentially a higher level of need than their established service users. The team realised as the work progressed that they had not been clear enough about the service aims when targeting their volunteers. They found that some older people and their volunteers had conceived the project as traditional befriending. Neither wanted to break their friendship and move on. The project worker realised that their marketing and training for this scheme should explicitly focus on the short-term nature of the intervention and considered that they might look to recruit volunteers with social care experience, who could accept a more professionalised concept of volunteer support.
Safeguarding of beneficiaries and volunteers	One group which provided social support for people with high-level complex needs did not allow volunteer befriending for people with dementia who lived alone, as part of their safeguarding policy for beneficiaries and volunteers. They identified the need for paid companionship for this cohort of people as a service deficit within statutory services.
Volunteers with specialist skills	Volunteers who were specifically recruited and trained, could and did offer great support to people with complex needs and serious health conditions in a range of community and specialist projects. In one project for people with Aphasia, volunteers were found primarily through the university networks, with Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) students engaging enthusiastically and trained by SALTs specialist teams from the hospital.

5.5. Volunteers as the route to sustainability

Volunteers were seen by some delivery partners as a route to sustainability. The extent to which this was feasible depended partly on the nature of the group but also on its maturity as an entity. One of the few projects which ceased before the end of the funding was a volunteer-led group who had some external support from an external partner organisation. Interpersonal difficulties and unbalanced allocation of workload between volunteers was a major factor in the early closure of this project.

In two cases, time-limited activity groups (walking, digital skills) were set up to meet identified interests and needs. From the outset, the workers were aware that these groups would have to be self-sufficient or they would disband at the end of the term. They tried, therefore, throughout the courses to identify and support individuals who might be able to take on the job of leading the groups. In neither case was this possible, which meant that gains in skills and social contact were lost. Several project workers noted that their existing groups would need to be strengthened with new volunteers to enable them to run as independent groups.

A project worker reflected on the attributes of one recently-established rural hub which would enable it to thrive self-sufficiently. It began with a steering group of local community activists, with positions within the village which gave them access to influence and resources. They remained committed to the project, while additional regular volunteers had been recruited during the project. They agreed to collect contributions for members of the hub to support its ongoing costs in a way which would not exclude anyone, developed rotas to share tasks on a weekly basis and were in a strong position to continue under their own steam.

The most common way in which groups could be sustained was if they were attached to an established organisation, which had funded workers who could give some administrative / governance support if volunteers ran the group itself.

5.6. How could this learning be used to influence future practice?

- Volunteering can benefit the volunteer as much as the people they are volunteering to support. Ask people to **help out in various ways** and let them know that their contribution is valuable and appreciated.
- Taking a broad view of volunteering and giving **support to those who need extra help** to become engaged extends the pool of people available and brings new capacity into the sector. It also requires imagination and energy
- Being clear on volunteer **roles and expectations**, the skills needed, the remit and scope of the service from the outset helps to prevent future challenges

- Volunteering can be interpreted as helping out, neighbouring and /or volunteering. This presents a dilemma for many third sector groups, since safeguarding responsibilities and governance issues often require a structure of **policy and procedures** and could impact on service development and scope. A broad framework to include all these personal conceptions helps projects to include all potential supporters but also to identify where gaps occur in their future service development and sustainability.
- In the project planning stages building in enough **paid staff resources** to adequately recruit, train and support volunteers will be time well spent.
- **Paid companionship** for a small cohort of people with high-level complex needs, particularly people with dementia who lived alone, was seen as a service deficit within statutory services.
- Where necessary, try to **involve enthusiastic community activists** who have access to local influence, resources and contacts.
- Some groups can be **sustained** if they are attached to an established organisation, which has funded workers who could give some administrative/governance support if volunteers ran the group.

Mini Case Study

Delivery partner - MAECare

Project - Making a Match

Context - The focus of the project was on finding out about the interests that older people have and matching them up with like-minded individuals so that they can build a friendship around a shared activity. Social opportunities were developed around the philosophy that services should find out what is important to isolated older people and build on that rather than expecting them to fit into services that already exist.

The typology of the Making a Match project was:

Target Group	Older people at risk of social isolation/loneliness
Type of intervention	Social Intervention
Aim of intervention	Reducing social isolation/Empowering older people to become more involved/Improving mental and physical health/Learning or improving skills / Promoting a positive image of ageing
Level of impact	Individuals/Interpersonal/Community/Organisational
Method of delivery	Face-to-Face
Type of delivery	One-to-one/Group
Location of provision	Community venue/Outdoor space/Provider's venue/Participant's home

The Project Worker planned to set up a Walking Football activity group as a means of involving older men. Initially working in partnership with Leeds United, two weekly sessions were piloted over a period of six weeks. There was extensive advertising: a volunteer and the worker leafleted most of the houses (900) in the immediate area as well as putting up posters on notice boards in local shops and churches. The sessions started on a field close to their community base and later had to move to a green space, just outside of the area.

The expectations were that working with a Leeds United trainer and providing the sessions free of charge would lend kudos to the activity and attract people to join. They assumed that they would settle on one day in the week which suited most people. In reality, different people attended different sessions, which made it hard to find one day per week acceptable to most people. The highest attendance at any one session was 14, some of whom lived out of the area and/or were younger than the target group.

By the time the Project Worker left, only a handful of evaluation forms had been completed. Overall, a huge amount of Project Worker time was invested with little to show for it.

However, a recently retired man, who had experience of setting up and coaching girls' football teams, had been attracted to taking up Walking Football. He went on to become a volunteer. With support of the project staff, he found indoor premises at a local high school for the winter months. He promoted the pay-as-you-attend sessions through personal, project and community Facebook pages, posters around the community and generally word-of-mouth. The first session in December was attended by 16 people, increasing to 21 by the third session. Just a couple from the original group attended, despite efforts made to contact and encourage others to come along. The volunteer set up a WhatsApp group which most people have joined; this enabled him to keep in touch in between sessions which strengthened the bonds within the group.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this volunteer developed creative ways of keeping people connected and sustained the walking football sessions remotely during lockdown. He delivered footballs and cones to members' homes and then hosted regular exercise sessions online. He also created a weekly online quiz, complete with teams and a league, and kept the group upbeat and together with WhatsApp and Facebook groups as a source of companionship, banter and fun. He also looked at ways of incorporating a social aspect in the future, once restrictions eased, such as a drink at a local pub once a month.

The success of the project at this stage was attributed to the volunteer, who lived locally and is well connected within the community, in particular the Jewish community. He was able to use this to promote the activity and was very successful in using social media.

He was competent, engaging and enthusiastic and also very professional, which meant that, whilst the group is run under the auspices of the project, it is led by a volunteer.

The Project Manager identified key learning points as getting the model right for the activity, good luck and being in the right place at the right time, spotting an opportunity and seizing it. On this occasion, this was a volunteer who could take this on the project, with support from workers when necessary.



This report presents the findings from the Test and Learn case studies of a very diverse group of delivery partners, whose key similarity was that they were commissioned to create new forms of support for older people who are lonely and isolated. The innovative nature of this work had implications for the organisations themselves, in that many had previously used their expertise with other clients groups or, although experienced in working with older people in general, had not necessarily engaged with these particular clients. This related to one of the key objectives in the TTS programme from the outset; the desire to work from an existing base of high quality voluntary services to **reach wider and deeper** into communities to develop more inclusive, supportive communities for a diverse group of older people.

The Test and Learn approach offered a way of recording their learning in a relatively light-touch way. Some partners were unused to report writing and required guidance but many workers' case studies revealed their professional practice of reflection and review. They provide insight for commissioners, funders and evaluators, not only into **what** works but into **how** it works. The majority of delivery partners chose to focus on their learning about key aspects of the project journey: promoting their project; reaching older people; engaging with and meeting older people's needs, interests and aspirations; enhancing their work through partnerships with other groups, organisations and volunteers.

Despite the diversity of projects and their beneficiaries, several key messages came through clearly. Promoting projects and establishing contacts with referrers involves a **process of relationship building which takes time and effort**, but once established pays dividends in access to people who are otherwise hard-to-reach. It was not successful with all targeted partners, which raises issues for the creation of a holistic system city-wide. Nor does it involve simple one-off contact as **networks need to be maintained**. Many people underestimated the efforts at this initial stage of their projects and felt that they needed to adjust future funding applications to address this groundwork stage.

Relationship building is similarly a key element in work with older people, individually and in groups. Project workers stressed the importance of **building trust** and of **co-production**; demonstrated by a **flexible approach** to the way projects were run and **responsiveness and respect for older people's wishes and needs**.

Partnerships were essential for delivery partners to establish their projects in many cases, offering clear benefits and additional resources when they could be established. This type of working was facilitated by **mutual interests, shared values and benefits, supported by a clear understanding between partners of each other's ways of working**. Issues such as internal pressures and changes in one of the partners created difficulties without this understanding. There was a two-way lack of knowledge and familiarity between community-based organisations and some sectors, notably care homes and some NHS

systems and sectors.

Volunteers, beneficiaries and projects shared significant reciprocal benefits in supporting isolated older people. The Test and Learn reports show the **potential to expand the pool of available volunteers** by taking a broad view of the contributions that older, isolated or lonely people can offer **with support and confidence-building**. Volunteering was seen by volunteers across a range of helping, neighbouring and more formal volunteering. A broad framework across these conceptions **offers an inclusive approach to volunteers** but requires thought about gaps within the projects which could impact on the range of service developments.

While these findings will be familiar from many previous reports, and indeed, were issues most delivery partners 'knew about' at the outset, their insightful and open Test and Learn reports make clear the energy and commitment required for the reality of 'walking the walk'. The achievements and outcomes of the energy and commitment of project workers are shown in a host of project case studies and blogs on the Leeds Older People's Forum website.

Delivery partners also recorded the ways in which the Test and Learn approach had helped to **develop their organisations**. Many used the learning and techniques to enhance their existing services. They focused on retaining their volunteers, especially if their staff resources enabled them to integrate project volunteers into their existing services. Some reflected that the learning they had made enabled them to write better, more informed funding bids to continue or develop the service/support further. Others maintained partnerships with other groups to continue successful work. All these aspects indicate the value of the Test and Learn approach to the growth of grassroots community-based organisations as well as to strengthening the service system as a whole. The findings of this report are complemented by **Report 9: Legacy, Systems Change and Sustainability**, which explores further evidence about the nature and development of a city-wide service system.

The final evaluation for the Time to Shine programme has been presented as a series of final reports.

Report 1: Executive Summary of Time to Shine

Report 2: Time to Shine Evaluation Methods

Report 3: Process Evaluation

Report 4: Intervention typologies

Report 5: Motivations and Barriers for beneficiary engagement

Report 6: Participation, engagement and outcomes for older people

Report 7: The impact of Time to Shine on project beneficiaries

Report 8: COVID-19 impact on the TTS programme

Report 9: Legacy, systems change and sustainability

Report 10: Test and Learn: (This report)

The following reports related to Test and Learn at TTS and within the Ageing Better programme can be found using the search box in the Resources section of the Leeds Older People's Forum website at <https://www.opforum.org.uk/resources/>

- ***In Mature Company's reflections on Test and Learn*** - An article for the Centre for Cultural Value.
- ***Greater than the sum of its parts: creating a cohesive programme*** - a Time to Shine learning report
- ***Creating a Cohesive Programme*** - a Time to Shine toolkit
- ***Sowing the seeds:*** reflections on running a small funds programme - a Time to Shine learning report in partnership with Leeds Community Foundation
- ***Small Funds:*** Setting up a micro-funding programme - a Time to Shine toolkit
- ***Test and Learn:*** Ageing Better - A report from Ageing Better at the National Lottery Community Fund
- ***Time to Shine*** Volunteer Listeners Report - A report from Leeds Beckett University, December 2019.

PAY

PAY AS YOU WANT

TO FEEL

...Everything and Everyone has a value



The final evaluation for the Time to Shine programme has been presented as a series of final reports.

Project name: _____

Form completed by: _____ Date: _____

- Please outline the issue, situation or question you'll explore in this Test and Learn example
- What did you plan to do?
- What expectations did you have?
- How did reality differ from your expectations? What was good? What was not so good?
- Why do you think this happened? What information did you gather from others to support this?
- What will you do differently next time?
- Please list the key learning points (in about 100 words)
- Are there any people / organisations in particular who would benefit from this learning?
- Do you have anything else to add?

Consent section:

Thank you for being a part of Time to Shine. We are very proud of what we do and we like to shout about it. If you are happy to help with this, please complete this section:

I give consent for Time to Shine to use the information I have given on this form: On printed marketing materials / On the website / On Social Media (Facebook & Twitter) / In press articles (e.g. Yorkshire Evening Post, BBC News, etc.) **Yes / No**

I also give my consent for images, quotes and sounds to be shared with our partners including but not limited to Leeds Community Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund, Camelot, or other National Lottery funders and our supporters. **Yes / No**

Name / Project / Signature / Date

Please get in touch if you wish to revoke this consent at any time and we will do our best to delete information about you from our collection and will not use it in future. Please be aware that if information has been posted online we cannot guarantee that it will not have been shared or copied by other people.

Project name: _____

This is the story of: _____

May we include this name if we have your permission to share this story with others?

Yes/ No

Form completed by: _____

Date: _____

- What was life like for you before becoming involved in the project? How did you feel?
- Why did you get involved?
- Who or what helped you? How did this help?
- What has changed for you as a result of this project?
- What is life like for you now? How do you feel?
- What would you like to do next?
- What would you say to others who are thinking of getting involved?
- Do you have anything else to add?
- Thank you for sharing your experiences. Please complete the consent form.

Consent section:

Thank you for being a part of Time to Shine. We are very proud of what we do and we like to shout about it. If you are happy to help with this, please complete this form:

I give consent for Time to Shine to use the information I have given on this form: On printed marketing materials / On the website / On Social Media (Facebook & Twitter) / In press articles (e.g. Yorkshire Evening Post, BBC News, etc.) **Yes / No**

I also give my consent for images, quotes and sounds to be shared with our partners including but not limited to Leeds Community Foundation, The National Lottery Community Fund, Camelot, or other National Lottery funders and our supporters. **Yes / No**

Name / Project / Signature / Date

Please get in touch if you wish to revoke this consent at any time and we will do our best to delete information about you from our collection and will not use it in future. Please be aware that if information has been posted online we cannot guarantee that it will not have been shared or copied by other people aware that if information has been posted online we cannot guarantee that it will not have been shared or copied by other people.

Leeds
Older
People's
Forum



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Time to
Shine



COMMUNITY
FUND